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Embaixada da Africa do Sul

Lisboa

STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN EAST TIMOR

11 SEPTEMBER 1999

Mr President,

We commend the United Nations Secretary-General, the Secretariat and the UN agencies, for the untiring efforts toward the East Timorese people. On behalf of the South African Government, I want to assure the Secretary General of our unwavering support for their efforts in this crucial situation.

Mr President,

Allow me - through you, Mr President - to express my country's condolences to the people of East Timor. The brutality that we have witnessed in East Timor, and continue to witness, is senseless. It should not have been allowed happen.

Mr President,

South Africa has always been committed to a peaceful resolution to the settlement of the East Timor issue. Our political leaders, especially former President Mandela and the then Deputy President, have taken special initiatives in support of United Nations actions regarding East Timor and always called for the release of the East Timorese leader, Mr Gusmao.

Also, the South African Government welcomed the signing of the New York Agreements of 5 May 1999. We understood that the Government of Indonesia had committed itself to full responsibility for the maintenance of law and order in East Timor during the process, including in the interim phase between the ballot and the implementation of its results. We also understood that the Government of Indonesia had committed itself to the responsibility for the protection of United Nations and other international personnel and property in East Timor.

It was with a deep sense of pride and relief that we observed the transparent and largely peaceful conduct of the ballot on 30 August 1999, in which UNAMET conducted itself with high distinction. The East Timorese people turned out in overwhelming numbers to exercise their democratic right to determine their own future with calm and dignity, despite ongoing violence and intimidation by the so-called militias who were bent on killing and maiming those who dared to choose to be free.

For us South Africans, those long lines of voters reminded us of our own first democratic election when we also had to overcome fear and violence in order to exercise our fundamental democratic right. Due to our commitment to democracy, when the United Nations

organised a referendum on independence in East Timor, South Africa sent a team of election experts, who had learned how to monitor the birth of a democracy by helping in nurturing our own. One of the three Commissioners of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was one of South Africa's distinguished judges, Mr Justice Johann Kriegler, Judge of the South African Constitutional Court, who had been chairperson of our independent electoral commission at our first ever democratic election. In other words, South African involvement in East Timor was more than just political

When the people of East Timor voted overwhelmingly for independence, we thought that the democratic transition which is currently under way in East Timor had more than a chance despite the odds against it. On a number of occasions my Government expressed its alarm at reports of escalating violence in East Timor in the lead up to the referendum. We urged all sides in East Timor to reject violence and intimidation and to exercise maximum restraint. At the same time, we expected that the Government of Indonesia would protect the people of East Timor and help guide them through their difficult democratic transition.

For a while everything looked so promising for East Timor. It seemed as if the people of East Timor would finally realize their long-held dream of self-determination.

Mr President,

The events that have unfolded so far have shocked us, and at the same time outraged the rest of the world. We keep wondering how it is possible for the so-called militia to cause such wide-spread humanitarian destruction in such a short time ? How could armed killers rampage throughout East Timor so easily ?

We must ensure that the so-called militias and other undemocratic forces are not allowed to reverse the democratic process in East Timor. If that happened, it would send the wrong signal to other people who face violent tyranny and domination elsewhere. This debate in the Security Council serves to assure the people of East Timor that they are not forgotten.

Mr President,

The South African Government and people condemn unreservedly this latest expression of violence that has brought about a complete collapse of social order in East Timor. In particular, we are appalled and saddened by the murder of countless unarmed and defenceless East Timorese people, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and the attacks on UN and other international personnel by the militias.

The South African Government welcomes the announcement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, that she will go to the region to obtain a first-hand assessment of the situation. We welcome also the recent agreement between the

Indonesian Government and the ICRC to re-establish the latter's operations in East Timor.

The South African Government calls on the Indonesian Government to protect the people of East Timor, to prevent the further escalation of violence in the territory and its spread to neighbouring West Timor, to guarantee the safe return of displaced persons to their homes, and to create the conditions to allow the International community to assist in addressing the growing humanitarian catastrophe.

We support the recent offers of international assistance made by the United Nations Secretary-General, and the Security Council, to the Government of Indonesia to restore stability and security in East Timor, and strongly urge the Indonesian Government to accept such assistance. Any urgent action by the United Nations will assure the whole world that our organisation is ready to stand up for suffering people wherever they are around the world.

The restoration of peace and stability to East Timor, and the full implementation of the results of the 30 August 1999 ballot are not only in the interests of the East Timorese but of all of the people of Indonesia.

Mr President,

South Africa has always sought to play a positive role in support of the UN Secretary-General's efforts to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the East Timor problem and to assist the people of East Timor in determining their own future.

We remain steadfastly committed to seeing the peaceful settlement of the East Timor matter and the granting of independence to the East Timorese people. Many may have been killed in the dawn of their freedom, but we believe that their lives were not lost in vain.

We commend the Members of the Security Council for having taken great risk by travelling to Indonesia and East Timor to witness the situation first hand. We eagerly await their report which we believe will lay the basis for the United Nations to discharge its solemn duty and responsibility of protecting peace and democracy in East Timor and elsewhere around the world.

Thank you, Mr President.